Chapter 3

British Operations in Malaya and Borneo, 1948–1966

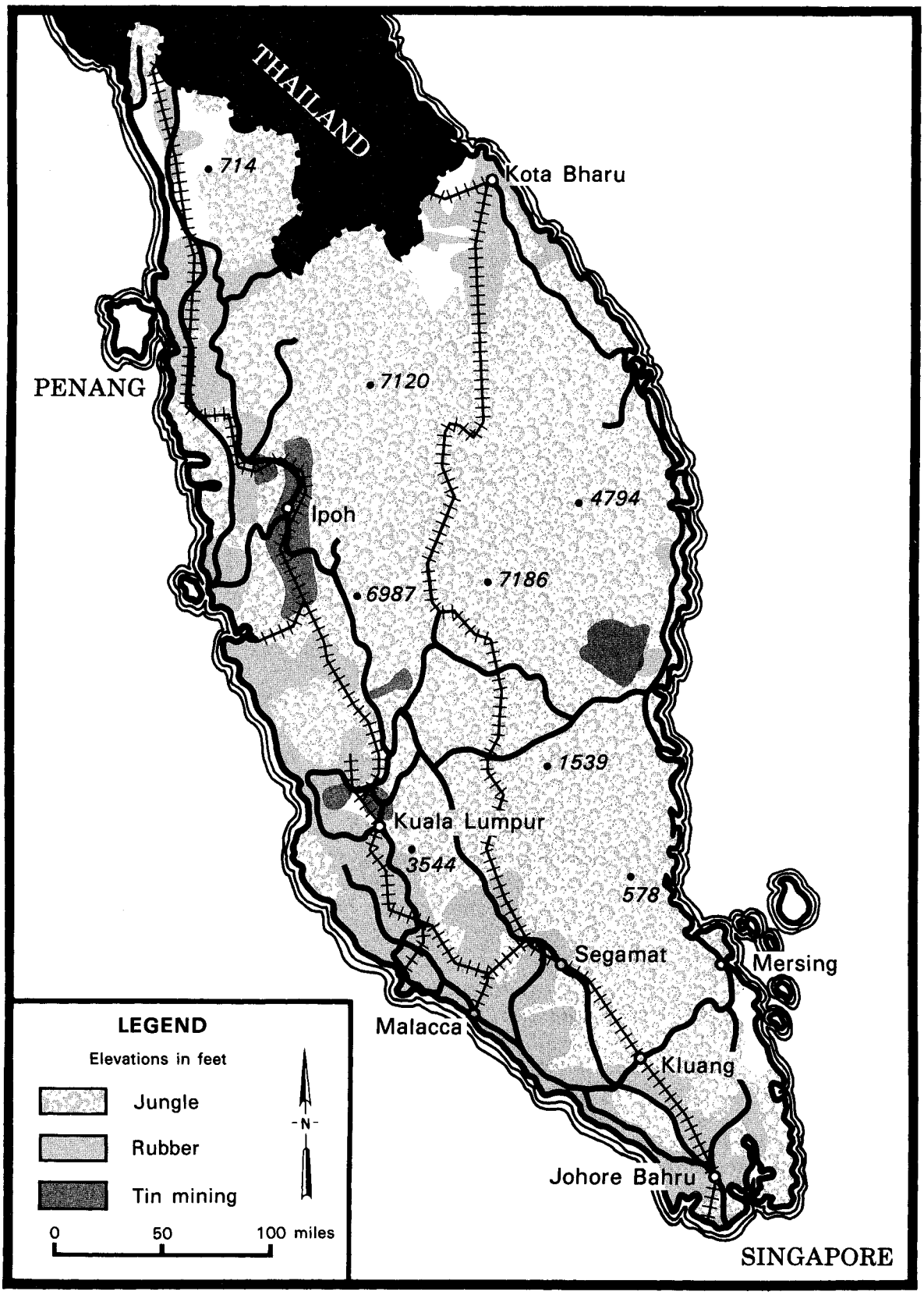
Part I. The Malayan Emergency

Introduction

From 1948 to 1966, substantial British, Gurkha, and Commonwealth infantry forces participated almost continuously in protracted light infantry operations in the Far East. In Malaya, from 1948 to 1960, these British-directed forces defeated an indigenous Communist insurgent force. Less than three years later, the British Army moved into North Borneo to secure that territory against Communist guerrillas and Indonesian aggression in a four-year war. In both wars, the combat took place in extremely inhospitable terrain and was swift, fleeting, and violent. This chapter considers both conflicts in a single case study because together they comprise a somewhat uniform body of British light infantry experience in low-intensity conflict. Comparing and contrasting these campaigns provides a useful analysis of the nature of light infantry and light infantry combat.

In Malaya, the Communist insurgency had its origins in the organizations established by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) during World War II to fight the Japanese. Trained, armed, and supplied by the British, the military arm of the MCP—known as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA)—grew into an extensive and efficient organization, some elements of which operated under British liaison officers. After the war ended, the MPAJA was disbanded and supposedly disarmed. However, the hard-core Communist elements of this small army hid their arms and supplies in secret caches for future use.

For a time, the MCP cooperated with the reestablished colonial administration in Malaya. When it became clear, however, that the aims of the MCP to influence the establishment of a socialist-type "People's Government" had no chance for success, the MCP adopted a more violent policy of social destabilization through labor unrest, strikes, and eventually, armed uprisings and acts of terrorism. In implementing this policy, "Vast quantities of rubber were stolen, rubber estate offices were burned down, British planters and miners and their Chinese, Indian and Malay employees were murdered" (see map 10).[1] In response, the government of the Federation of Malaya (hereafter referred to as the Federation) declared a state of emergency on 18 June 1948 and adopted emergency powers to deal with the violence. In addition, the MCP was outlawed on 23 July 1948.



Source: Miers, *Shoot to Kill*, 217.

Map 10. Malaya

Initially, the MCP enjoyed significant success. Even though its armed elements, now known as the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA), never grew beyond a strength of 8,000 men and women, the MCP held sway over a large portion of the population and brought the huge rubber industry to a standstill.[2] Caught short by the suddenness and scope of the outbreak, the British introduced major developments that enabled them to regain control of the situation. These developments were the adoption of the Briggs Plan and the establishment of the Jungle Warfare School (JWS).

Named after its primary author, General Sir Harold Briggs, and adopted on 1 June 1950, the Briggs Plan aimed to bring the population of Malaya under closer administrative control and to isolate the guerrillas. Based in part on a study done by Michael Calvert, the former Chindit 77th Brigade commander, the plan had several main features. First, it required the rapid resettlement of isolated squatters and villagers into areas under the surveillance of the police, Home Guards (a paramilitary defense force), and the army. It also called for the consolidation of the local labor in mines and on estates to provide this rural population with more security. Furthermore, it instituted a thorough program of food control to deny material support to the MCP and MRLA. In addition, it called for a strengthening of the intelligence network through recruitment and training of criminal investigators and Special Branch police personnel (intelligence). Finally, it established a joint framework for coordinated activities between the civil, police, and army organizations. The Briggs Plan acknowledged that the conflict would be protracted and laid the foundations for a long-range solution.[3] Ultimately, over 600,000 villagers were resettled under the plan.[4]

The Briggs Plan embodied the overall strategy for solving the problem of the Emergency. The JWS provided the doctrinal basis and training for the tactical operations by army forces against the guerrillas. Established in 1948 at the Far East Training Center in Johore Bahru, the school was organized by Lieutenant Colonel Walter Walker, a three-year veteran of the Burma campaign in World War II. Basically, the school ran a six-week course for unit cadres and a six-week course, primarily cadre taught, for unit main bodies. Training included instruction and exercises in land navigation, marksmanship, quick fire, patrolling, jungle tactics, ambushes, tracking, and the use of jungle resources. Graduation exercises were live patrols in areas where guerrillas were known to be operating. Every battalion deployed to Malaya passed through the JWS before being committed to actual operations. The improvement in tactical operations by battalions trained at the JWS forced the MRLA to call off its large-scale operations and form into smaller, hit-and-run units known as Independent Platoons.[5]

By the end of 1951, the Briggs Plan and the improved tactical performance of the security forces impelled the MCP and MRLA to give up the initiative, turning from the role of the hunter to that of the hunted. The appointment in January 1952 of General Sir Gerald Templer as high commissioner hastened this transition. Through Templer's forceful leadership and insistence on full cooperation between the various civil, military, and police agencies, the guerrillas were driven deeper into the jungle. The fighting of the war and the

Table 4. State and District War Executive Committees

SWEC	*DWEC*	*Responsibilities*
	CIVIL	
State prime minister (PM)	District officer	Local government
Executive secretary		Affairs of PM's office
Information officer	Information officer	Public relations/PSYOP
	POLICE	
Chief police officer	Police commander	All police in area
Head, Special Branch	Special Branch officer	Police intelligence
Home Guard officer	Home Guard officer	Home Guard units
	MILITARY	
Brigade commander	Battalion commander	All military troops in area
Military intelligence officer	Military intelligence officer	Military intelligence

Note: Community leaders, local planters and industrialists, and invited specialists occasionally attended meetings.

civil administration of the country, Templer stated, were "completely and utterly interrelated." It was during his tenure that the insurrection was essentially brought under control and the patterns of antiguerrilla operations established.

The Briggs Plan directed a joint civil-military-police approach to eliminating the insurgency. The plan focused on the Federation of Malaya, which included nine Malay states and two Straits Settlements, each of which was further divided into circles or districts. At each echelon, a War Executive Committee (WEC) was established that was headed by a senior political administrator (chief minister or district officer) and which included the senior police officer, military commander, Home Guard officer, and information officer in the area, plus others as required (see table 4). These state and district WECs carried out the policies established from the federal level by the high commissioner and director of operations, which were establishment of curfews, food control, route control, and direct operations. This kind of integration was essential to ensure that the security forces acted in support of the government and that the independent chains of command did not function at cross-purposes.[6]

Following decisions taken during State and District War Executive Committee (SWEC and DWEC) meetings, military operations were planned and supervised from the Joint Operations Rooms (JOR), established most often in police headquarters at each level. Infantry brigade or battalion intelligence officers ran the JOR and remained abreast of conditions at all times. Essentially, the JOR functioned as a clearing house for intelligence from the police, military, and Special Branch. One of the most important functions of the JOR was to provide clearances to unit patrols to operate with a relatively free rein in certain areas thought to harbor guerrillas. Most battalions conducted regular, daily meetings with police personnel at the JOR. Lasting an

hour or so, these meetings—"morning prayers," as they were called—enabled each service to review new intelligence and to be informed of the progress of ongoing and near-term operations. The JOR also maintained radio and telephone links with subordinate police and military units.

At the peak of the antiguerrilla war, the Malayan government employed 40,000 soldiers, 45,000 police, and 1.25 million Home Guards to root out the insurgents and protect the population.[7] As mentioned earlier, the Communist terrorists numbered only about 8,000 at their peak. Such a large imbalance of force, though, is not unusual in insurgent warfare.

As part of the Emergency, the British employed all kinds of infantry units. Of the more than thirty-five battalions deployed to Malaya from 1948 to 1960, the largest number came from Gurkha regiments stationed in the Far East. Australia and New Zealand also provided battalions. However, a significant number of regular and motorized-mechanized infantry units from Great Britain and other areas were also used in the Emergency, including, for example, the Green Howards, the Gordon Highlanders, the South Wales Borderers, the Somersets, and others. Although almost all of the regular infantry battalions (and some of the Gurkhas) had little or no jungle light infantry experience, the JWS course provided them with the skills and attitudes required to operate against the guerrillas until actual operations refined their expertise. Interestingly, many of the soldiers used in Malaya were first-term drafted soldiers on short tours. Nonetheless, these soldiers proved more than capable, although they did complicate the training problem and cause unit turmoil through their high turnover rate.[8]

The Threat

The Malaya Communist Party (MCP) maintained an organization quite similar to that of the Federation (see figure 9). While their strength varied from one district to the next, each district contained at least one independent Communist platoon. These units communicated within and between districts primarily by couriers.

The Communist terrorists (guerrillas)—who were designated CTs by the British—were armed primarily with the small arms left over from the MPAJA. They received no significant external aid from China or the USSR. The main strengths of the CTs were their flexibility, discipline, hardihood, attitude, and ability to react quickly. Careful and wary, they demonstrated adept jungle craft in their contacts with security forces. As jungle fighters, they were worthy opponents.

After the arrival of General Templer, the CTs abandoned their policy of frequent confrontation. Instead, they now aimed at simply remaining in being, hoping to preserve their strength. Thus, they broke up their larger units and adopted evasive tactics. Avoiding direct clashes with the army or the police, small groups of guerrillas focused on careful ambushes, quick raids, and terrorism of the local population when they failed to cooperate.[9] As a result, the army had to root them out of the jungle singly and in small groups. By the end of 1952, progress and success at battalion level were measured in terms of the number of kills a unit produced.

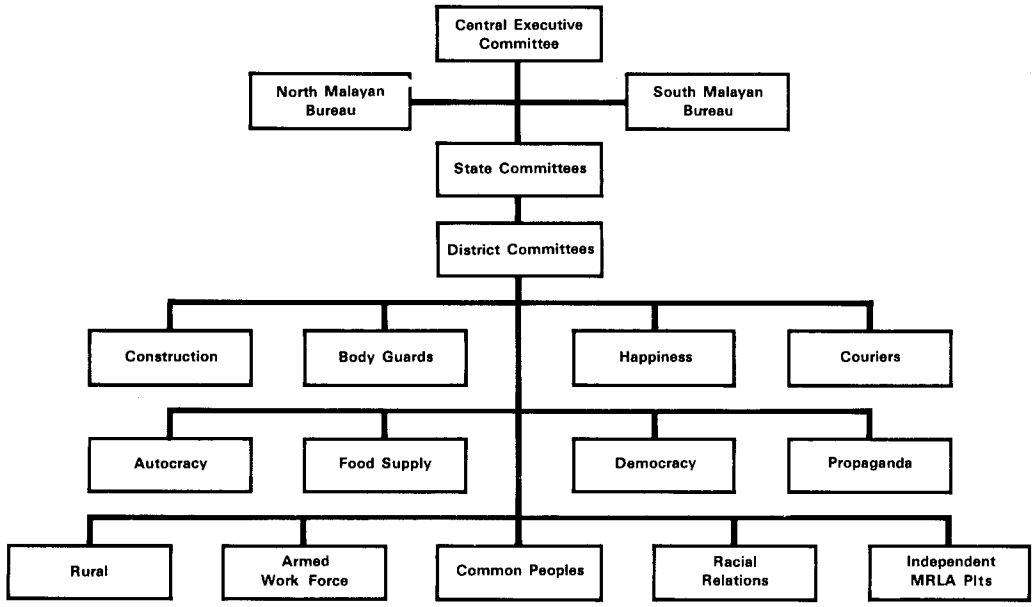


Figure 9. Organization of the MCP and MRLA

The great weakness of the terrorists was their reliance on civilian support for food and information. Denial of such support through the provisions of the Briggs Plan was an important tenet in the British operational concept. Implementing the Brigg's Plan, however, was difficult given the number of Communist sympathizers (estimated at 60,000 by one source) and the ability of the CTs to maintain contact with the population.

Operational Concepts

The primary theme of British military operations in Malaya was the painstaking, long-term, and systematic elimination of Communist terrorists from the entire country. This process required classifying the various districts in the country by color. Terming a district "black" meant that the CTs retained significant capabilities there. A "white" district was an area that had been cleared of CTs to the point that tactical operations were no longer required there, and all or most of the civil rights suspended during the Emergency could be restored. But not all areas could be cleared at once. Thus, security forces in one district might be required to maintain a holding action against the CTs, while civil and military efforts were applied in another area to wipe out the CTs and establish "white" status there. The British effort initially went to the areas where the Communists were weakest; then they cleared the "blackest" areas. Success of antiguerrilla operations could be measured in terms of how much of the Federation had been declared "white" and how fast it was changing from "black" to "white." Once an area was declared "white," it remained the responsibility of the police and the Home Guard to preserve its "white" status against the reemergence of the guerrilla organization. Patience, harmony, and cooperation were indispensable to this approach.

Active military operations assumed three main forms.[10] First, combat patrols moved out with specific objectives based on intelligence produced at the JOR or provided by Special Branch informers. Such actions varied in size and duration depending on the target; they were frequently unsuccessful. The second method, described by one Malayan commander as a "partridge drive," involved the saturation of an area with large units—battalion to brigade size—with the object of flushing out CTs by employing sheer numbers. Sometimes, these operations lasted two to three months. However, they were even more unsuccessful than the first method, because they were difficult to disguise. The CTs were seldom taken by surprise, and the jungle offered too many places for them to hide from the bushbeaters. Battalion and larger operations based on more or less conventional tactics just did not work well at all.[11] A more subtle means was required.

The third operational method, sometimes called jungle bashing, made the most of the highly developed jungle craft of the British infantry and also exploited the best available intelligence on the enemy. Using this approach, units quietly deployed several patrols from squad to platoon strength into an area where the guerrillas were known or thought to be. Each platoon established a temporary base (24—48 hours) from which it pushed out smaller patrols in a systematic fashion to cover thoroughly and carefully a designated area. Once one area had been checked out, the platoon moved on to a new area, and the process was repeated. In this manner—while being resupplied, if needed, by air, road, or cache—the units could thoroughly investigate a jungle area in two or three weeks, while maintaining secrecy. This saturation patrolling frequently produced contacts: the British were often able to surprise the terrorists in their jungle camps or on the march.

In the last half of the Emergency, company-size bases were established on a thirty-day basis. These bases were fortified to an extent, although they were not especially vulnerable to attacks by the weak CT units then in being. The bases functioned as the administrative, logistical, and command and control centers for the platoons and squad patrols emanating from them. After a base was maintained for a month, it was closed down and the company removed. A new company was then moved into a new area. The British used this technique whenever they wanted to force a group of CTs to abandon an area. Forced to move by this pressure, the Communists were vulnerable and subject to ambush. Even if no contacts were made, this method caused the CTs to lose their support and information in one area and to begin anew in another.[12]

The operational concept described above required that certain principles be observed. One of these was that close coordination of civil, military, and police actions had to be maintained. Equally important was the need to sustain decentralized, offensive, and extended operations that granted junior commanders a wide latitude in decision making. Decentralization was necessary in operations because of the wide area to be covered, the limited forces available, the dispersion of the CTs, and the demonstrated failure of large-unit operations. Since fights took place almost exclusively at the team, squad, and platoon level, the commanders of units needed to have a free hand to exercise their own judgment in the field. Company commanders, in particular, had to

be given broad discretion so that they could independently plan and execute their intentions based on their own assessment of the situations in their areas. This was especially necessary because higher-level commanders lacked both the physical means and the inclination to visit their units daily or to approve every tactical plan.

Because the army units were hunting small groups of CTs—sometimes even single individuals—operations were necessarily extended in time. Once a patrol entered the jungle, it normally was prepared to stay out for four to ten days. In some cases, units stayed in the jungle without relief for as much as thirty days. Units retained a pronounced offensive frame of mind, ready to spring into action at the first sight of the enemy.

Patrolling a coconut plantation

Applying all of these operational methods permitted the British to maintain unrelenting pressure on the guerrillas. Constant harassment kept the enemy on the move, disrupted his command and control, confused him, frayed his nerves, and prevented him from carrying out his operations.[13] When this kind of pressure was combined with police-directed curfews, searches, psychological warfare, and stringent food denial programs, the enemy frequently surrendered out of hunger and a broken spirit.

Intelligence in Malaya

"There is no doubt that the soundest (and, in the end, the cheapest) investment against Communist insurgency in any country is in a strong, handpicked, and well-paid police intelligence organization, backed up by the funds to offer good rewards."[14] The above quotation typifies commentaries on the Malayan Emergency, most of which agree that timely, accurate intelligence was the most important ingredient leading to tactical success against the terrorists. But in the early stages of the conflict, obtaining accurate information was a difficult problem. Villagers, too terrified by the terrorists to cooperate with authorities, provided only a few contacts and little information.[15] As the guerrillas suffered casualties and retreated into the jungle, however, the intelligence flow increased in volume and reliability. Nonetheless, the need for intelligence became even more acute as the CTs adopted more evasive policies. The problem for the British forces after 1951 was one of putting military forces into contact with the insurgents. Success increasingly depended on reliable intelligence.

The ability of the army to produce intelligence on the locations and movements of the CTs was limited. The best commanders spent "long hours in tactful discussions with police officers, administrators, rubber planters, tin miners, and local community leaders, getting them to cooperate with the soldiers and to promote the flow of information to them."[16] To a large degree, the army simply had to rely on the police intelligence organization, the Special Branch, and other civil agencies for information. Of these organizations, the Special Branch, by far, developed the most intelligence. The joint organization of civil, military, and police agencies established to prosecute the war lent itself well to a comprehensive exchange of information between the services.

The Special Branch, for its part, painstakingly built up the enemy order of battle based on several sources: CT food suppliers, captured documents, informers, surrendered and captured personnel, personal reconnaissance, and its own intimate knowledge of the area. Most of the Special Branch officers were unusual men—energetic, insightful, extremely dedicated, and well suited to the physical and intellectual demands of their positions. Through the use of impressive cash awards, mild (legal) coercion, and the promise of immunity, the Special Branch lured many Communist sympathizers to betray their former comrades. Though the information acquired by the Special Branch often took a long time to mature, the support it provided the British was priceless. Army commanders unanimously praised the Special Branch for its cooperation and competence.[17]

Tactical success and the flow of public information were inextricably linked. Thus, the more guerrillas that were killed by the infantry, the more information came in. This increase in information subsequently led to even more kills,

and so on. The pump always had to be primed, however, by the confidence of the population that the security forces (particularly the police posts) could protect them.

One of the best sources of information for the Special Branch and the army was surrendered enemy personnel. Disillusioned by their leadership, despondent about their cause, harassed constantly by British patrols, many CTs proved vulnerable to the promise of lenient treatment should they decide to surrender. It was well known, for example, that few surrendered personnel had ever been prosecuted for their former actions. So, many came forward when the opportunity arose.

The British used these surrendered men against the CTs in many ways. Frequently, they led British patrols straight back to CT jungle camps within twenty-four hours of their surrenders. Some were armed and used as guides and trackers for long periods of time. Others composed psychological operations tapes that were then broadcast by aircraft loudspeakers to induce other surrenders. Surrendered Communists invariably provided oral information or documents concerning the personalities, plans, and methods of the MCP and MRLA. A great deal of the information maintained by the Special Branch concerning the Communist terrorists' order of battle came from surrendered enemy personnel. No surrenders, however, occurred without tactical military pressure.

Aerial reconnaissance and extensive patrolling also produced useful intelligence regarding the existence of camps, food dumps, jungle gardens, trails, and terrain. This kind of information was then used as the basis for directing future patrols. When closely analyzed, this intelligence produced reliable predictions on likely enemy locations and movements and increased the probability that contacts with the enemy would be made.[18]

Jungle Tactics Against the Malayan Insurgents

The central, omnipresent task of the British light infantry in Malaya was to go into the jungle, find the enemy, and kill him by surprise as often and as quickly as possible. This task, coupled with the nature of the enemy and the environment, led directly to the adoption of the principles described earlier—decentralization, offensiveness, extended operations, relentless military pressure, and the granting of wide latitude to junior leaders and commanders. In implementing these principles, however, the infantry did not wait for the CTs to act; they doggedly and expertly hunted them down in their jungle hideouts and ambushed them at trails and contact points.

The specific tactics employed by the infantry are described in lucid detail in a pamphlet entitled *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya.* Produced by the Jungle Warfare School and widely known as the "Atom manual" (see bibliography and appendix A for further information), this pamphlet functioned as a tactical bible. Three editions were published from 1952 to 1957; each incorporated lessons learned through actual combat experiences. Space prohibits a complete discussion of all of the techniques and SOPs contained in the manual; however, five main areas—tactical organization and equipment, field craft, patrolling, ambushes, and attacks—are outlined below.

Tactical Organization and Equipment

The ATOM manual acknowledged the failure of conventional tactics and organization when applied to counterinsurgency warfare. Instead, it prescribed the need for flexibility based on the factors of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time). As a result, no standard platoon and company organizations were used in Malaya. The organization adopted was made to fit the situation but was always light and mobile.[19]

Squad organization also varied, although it most often assumed a 3x3 grouping reminiscent of the CCF in Korea. Each squad consisted of a reconnaissance group or point group, a support group manning a light machine gun, and a rifle group of three riflemen. The ATOM manual strongly advocated the 3x3 organization for several reasons:

- It simplified the squad leader's job of control.
- It provided the grouping needed for the effective minor tactics that had been evolved for use against the CT.
- It helped to train the potential junior leaders who could take over a section if necessary.
- It provided small three-man teams, which experience had shown to be good basic teams.[20]

Within these squads, care was taken to keep rucksack loads as light as possible. For example, only one set of spare clothing was taken so that soldiers could sleep dry. Wet, dirty clothing was redonned each morning. Moreover, the use of underwear was not recommended on the grounds that it could lead to skin infections. Hammocks were used for quick, dry sleeping perches. The men also carried improvised canvas strips for shelters and stretchers (when needed).[21]

The primary infantry weapon was the 7.62-mm self-loading rifle, although carbines and submachine guns were also issued. Reconnaissance and point groups carried shotguns for punch and lethality at short range. Soldiers also used shotguns on night ambushes for the same reason. The Bren gun (light machine gun) formed the main unit of firepower in the squad. Interestingly, the 2-inch mortar was deemed unsuited for operations in the Malayan jungle. Instead, soldiers used a smaller, short-range grenade discharger.[22]

Field Craft

The success of small-unit tactics depended entirely on the quality of field craft employed by units. Movement through the jungle required concentration and meticulous attention to detail to avoid being surprised or tipping off the CTs. Wary, alert, senses honed for survival, the terrorists quickly spotted any inadvertent signs of the British presence. To avoid their telltale scents, British troops used no chewing gum, tobacco, toothpaste, hair tonic, or insect spray. Even the use of soap and the taking of baths by soldiers was taboo while they were on patrol or maintaining an ambush site. To limit the chances of detection, leaders also controlled fires, cooking, and eating. Furthermore, prior to leaving an overnight patrol base, soldiers erased every trace of their presence.

Trudging through Malayan swamps

For soldiers to detect the passage or presence of the guerrillas required finely tuned powers of observation. All troops received training in stalking techniques and in spotting significant jungle signs, such as overturned leaves, bent twigs, bruised blades of grass, or pieces of bark cut by passing humans. The examples set by aborigine trackers aided the development of such skills among the rank and file soldiers, who, in emulation, sometimes became as adept as the trackers themselves.

Expert field craft also demanded extremely high standards of discipline and patience as well as scrupulous attention to the environment. One miscue or careless act could put a patrol in jeopardy or send a quarry out of harm's way. Maintaining such high levels of field craft was largely a function of good training at the Jungle Warfare School and in unit areas and of good, strict leadership while in the jungle. The infantry needed little prodding from their leaders to stay alert, however, because they respected the skills of their opponents. Moreover, they knew one of the primary lessons of jungle combat: In jungle warfare, where most contact comes as a surprise to both sides, the man who shoots first survives.[23]

Patrolling

Infantry units in Malaya spent more time patrolling than in any other type of tactical activity. All patrols moved out with a clear mission, defined by the company commander in most cases. Activities on patrol were strictly regulated by adherence to detailed SOPs, by high standards of field craft, and by good jungle sense. Great patience and concentration were required, because hundreds of hours of patrolling were needed to make contact with the enemy.[24] Patrols often stayed in the jungle for one to two weeks without seeing a single terrorist.[25]

The normal rate of movement in the jungle ranged from one-half mile (average) to one mile an hour. Land navigation was difficult; dead reckoning—that is following a compass bearing and measuring one's pace—appeared to be the most common means. Cutting the bush was avoided; instead, patrols pushed carefully and steadily through it creating little noise. The principle that one must "never fight the jungle" dictated this methodical, patient approach.

Because men who are still have the tactical advantage in the jungle, patrols were most vulnerable to enemy ambush or detection during movement. Patrols learned to pause and listen for ten minutes for every ten or twenty minutes of movement. Patrols also moved during heavy rainfall to shield the noise of their movement. Conversation among the men was restricted to low whispers.

Two basic formations were used. In thick jungle, the squad patrol moved in single file. In clearer terrain, the patrol adopted an open formation (see figure 10). In each case, the squad leader (and a guide, if one was used) followed directly behind the reconnaissance group. Captured terrorists, surrendered enemy personnel, and local inhabitants—anyone who had intimate knowledge of the area—functioned frequently as patrol guides.[26] Some surrendered enemy personnel established long relationships with units and coached the soldiers on proper field craft.

When following the terrorists' trails, patrol leaders often employed Iban or Dyak trackers, who were brought over from Sarawak in North Borneo as early as 1948.[27] Artists in tracking and experts in jungle lore, these men became very much a part of the units they supported and were highly honored. Capable of following trails for days, these aboriginal trackers worked in pairs and walked at the heads of squads, with two other scouts following directly

SINGLE-FILE FORMATION

1. This formation will *not* be used in rubber or other plantations.

2. Single-file formation is used in the jungle where troops cannot move in a more open formation.

3. Distances between individuals and groups will vary according to visibility.

4. Generally there should never be less than five yards between each man. Distance between groups should be governed by the nature of the ground and vegetation and the necessity for maintaining control.

5. A tracker group, if accompanying the patrol, will be located in a suitable position for immediate employment.

OPEN FORMATION

1. "One Up":

(a) *Advantages.*

(1) Ease of control.
(2) Good fire power to front and flanks.
(3) On contact, the leading group only is committed and two are available to maneuver.

(b) *Disadvantages.*

(1) With the fleeting targets that are offered in Malaya, fewer men are likely to see the CT on first contact.

2. "Two Up":

(a) *Advantages.*

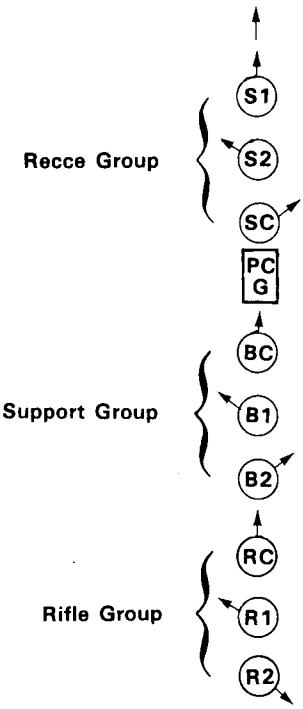
(1) A wider front is covered.
(2) The formation is less vulnerable to ambush.
(3) More weapons are available to fire forward in event of a sudden contact.

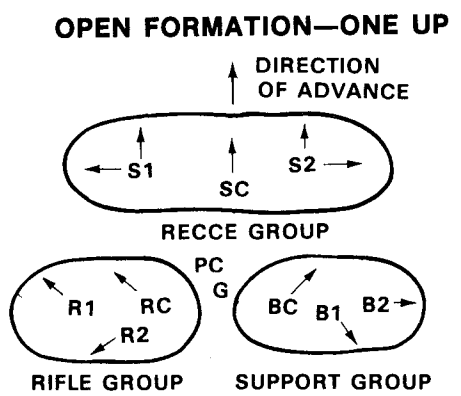
(b) *Disadvantages.*

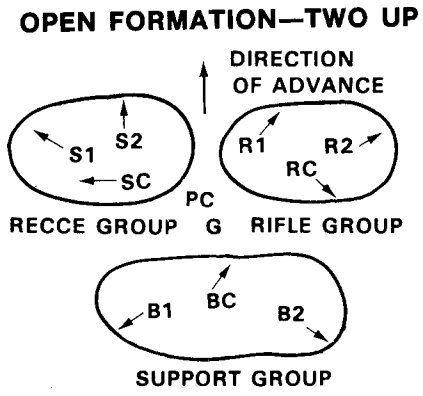
(1) On contact, the two forward groups may be committed and there are less troops available for maneuver.

3. "Three Up": Although this formation will cover more frontage, it is difficult to control and allows nothing for maneuver.

4. Distances between individuals and groups will vary according to the ground through which troops are passing.







Note: Small arrows indicate the direction of responsibility for observation.

LEGEND

S1—Leading Scout
S2—No. 2 Scout
SC—Recce Group Commander
PC—Section or Patrol Commander
G—Guide
B1—Bren Gun No. 1
B2—Bren Gun No. 2
BC—Support Group Commander and Section 2 IC
RC—Rifle Group Commander
R1—No. 1 Rifleman
R2—No. 2 Rifleman

Source: The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations, Malaya (Third Edition, 1958), II-6.

Figure 10. Patrol formations

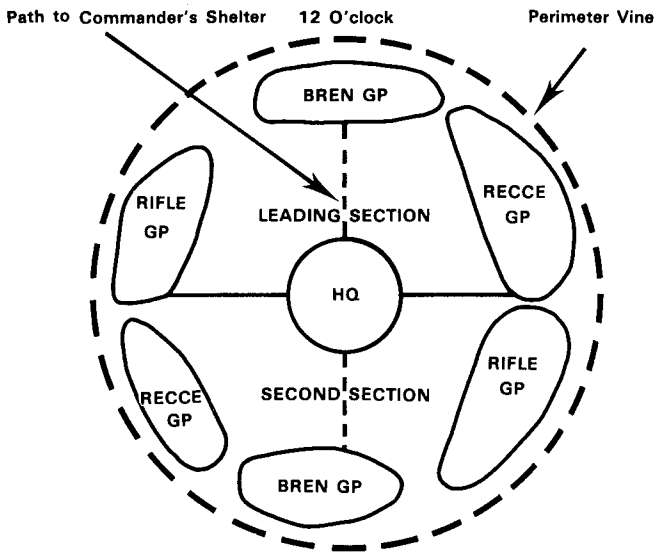
behind them, whose sole job was to protect the trackers. Tracker dogs proved to be much less reliable. They often left the trail for the smell of water.[28] Tracker dogs required handlers, too, and a protective scout team.

Patrols normally stayed in the jungle for four to ten days, although two- to four-week operations were not uncommon, particularly if ambushes were the object. In some cases, extreme distances were covered.[29] The most effective method of operation was the establishment of a temporary platoon base, from which circulated a number of small patrol elements in varying directions. Systematically exploring a given area, these small teams moved out without rucksacks or rations. If an occupied enemy camp was found, one member of the patrol went back to the base to inform the platoon leader, who then planned and led a platoon-size raid on the camp as quickly as possible.

The size of these circulating patrol elements depended on the courage, confidence, and field craft of the patrols' members. In some cases, two-man teams were used, in other instances, whole squads. Whatever the size, these elements took care to avoid bumping into each other.

No terrain was avoided. The patrols hunted the guerrillas wherever they holed up, including swamps. Sleeping dry in hammocks above the water, swamp patrols spent the days in thigh- to chest-deep water.

Patrols generally did not move at night because of the poor visibility in the jungle. Instead, they occupied a small, temporary patrol base as illustrated in figures 11 and 12. On the other hand, patrols did move at night through rubber plantations because of the cleared undergrowth and good visibility.



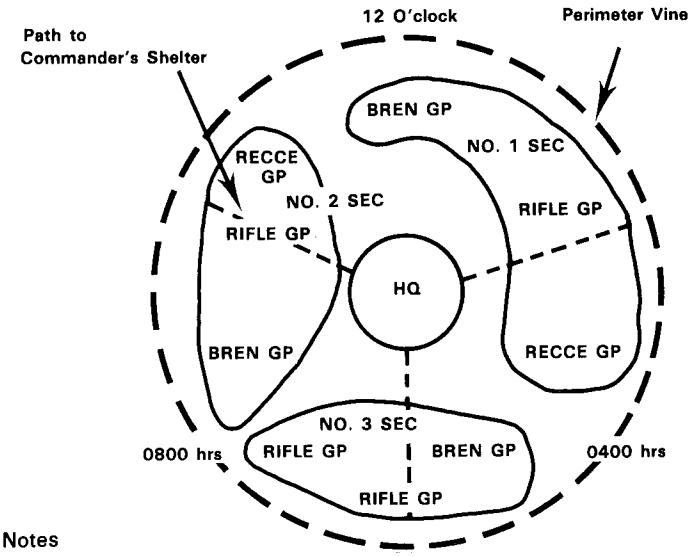
Notes

1. The patrol commander having indicated 12 o'clock, the leading section of the patrol moves into position between 0300 hrs., 1200 hrs., and 0900 hrs. The second section moves into position between 0300 hrs., 0600 hrs., and 0900 hrs.

2. If the layout is kept standard within subunits, every man and group will know their approximate positions and who will be on their left and right.

Source: The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations, Malaya (Third Edition, 1958), II-6.

Figure 11. Suggested layout of a two-squad base



Notes

1. The patrol commander having indicated 12 o'clock, No. 1 Section moves to take up position between 12 o'clock and 0400 hrs., No. 2 Section between 12 o'clock and 0800 hrs., No. 3 Section between 0400 hrs and 0800 hrs.

2. The entrance to this base is at 12 o'clock.

Source: The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations, Malaya (Third Edition, 1958), II-6.

Figure 12. Suggested layout of a three-squad base

When leaving the jungle to return to their garrisons, patrols usually exited at a certain point and specified time to avoid being mistaken for guerrillas themselves. Moreover, company commanders always kept a patrol on standby in readiness to react to a guerrilla raid or a timely tip on guerrilla locations. Finally, patrols never used reconnaissance by fire in Malaya in any fashion. (For further information, a patrol aide-memoire from the ATOM manual is reproduced in this chapter at appendix B.)

Ambushes

Whenever the flow of intelligence promised the likelihood of an enemy contact, the light infantry dispatched ambush patrols to lay in wait. Commanders often formed special ambush teams from men noted for their marksmanship, field craft, or other particular quality (such as familiarity with the area of the objective).[30] A high proportion of these ambushes occurred on the jungle fringe where the terrorists met with their food and information sources. The British established strict rules in regard to the conduct of such ambushes and spent a good deal of garrison time training for them. Success depended on adequate preparation, which included a thorough plan, weapons check, equipment check, briefing to all members, and a rehearsal. Night ambushes were rehearsed at night. Because each ambush was considered unique, the patrol organized for the ambush varied in size and content based on the situation.

The ATOM manual cites a number of conditions that are essential to the performance of successful ambushes:

- Good shooting from all positions—kneeling, sitting, standing, lying, and firing behind cover.
- A high standard of training in ambush techniques.
- Careful planning and briefing.
- First-class security in all stages of the ambush.
- Intelligent layout and siting.
- Concealment.
- A high standard of battle discipline throughout the operation.
- Determination by all members of the ambush party to wait and kill.
- A simple clear-cut plan for springing the ambush.[31]

Of these principles, perhaps the most important was the requirement for strict, unflinching battle discipline. These principles are explained in further detail in the manual.

Although 80 percent of the British ambushes were sprung within nine hours of the occupation of a site, the infantry also mounted some long-term ambushes. Naturally, these operations were more complex, requiring the establishment of a base area some distance away from the ambush site. Arrangements for feeding, sleeping, security, and relief of the ambush group also had to be made. Ideally, the patrol contained three separate groups: one at the ambush site, one at rest, and one in reserve. If the patrol was too small for this organization, procedure demanded that the ambush group simply retire from the ambush site when it was necessary to eat and sleep, and to return later.

In this manner, the light infantry held themselves in position to ambush for some incredibly long periods of time. One platoon of the Green Howards staked out the house of a terrorist food supplier for twenty consecutive nights.[32] In another case, a patrol maintained an ambush for ten days and nights. Given seven days' rations, they simply were told to make them last ten days.[33] In one of the longest cases on record, Brigadier Walter Walker, commanding the 99th Gurkha Infantry Brigade, left a patrol in place for twenty-seven days. On the twenty-eighth day, the terrorists finally entered the killing ground and suffered two dead and one surrendered.[34] The results of such long-term operations may seem paltry compared to the sacrifice made, but these methods were the only guarantee of success. To succeed, ambush groups had to achieve high standards of field discipline.

To lessen the chance of ambush failures, the ATOM manual analyzes the reasons for failures and suggests remedies:

- Disclosure of the ambush by the noise made by cocking weapons and moving safety catches or change levers. Check your weapons, practice men in their silent handling, and ensure that all weapons are ready to fire.
- There was a tendency to shoot high at the light face of the terrorist. This must be corrected on the jungle range.

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A native tracker from Sarawak

• Disclosure of the ambush position by footprints made by the ambush party moving into position and by movement of individuals at the crucial time, when the CT were approaching.

• There was a lack of fire control, and commanders were unable to stop the firing and start the immediate follow up.

• Commanders were badly sited with consequent lack of control.

• There was a lack of all-round observation resulting in CT arriving in the area of an ambush unannounced.

• There were misfires and stoppages through failure to clean, inspect and test weapons and magazine.

• There was a lack of a clearly defined drill for opening fire, and orders were contradictory.

• There was a tendency for all to select and fire at the same target.

• Fire was opened prematurely.[35]

The Attack

The typical targets of attacks by British light infantry in Malaya were small parties of guerrillas hiding out in jungle camps, who were discovered by patrol elements. Attacks against these guerrillas took several forms. One type of attack took place when the guerrilla sentry recognized the approach of the infantry patrol and took it under fire. In this situation, the patrol executed an immediate attack drill by sweeping through the camp as quickly as possible. This kind of attack seldom succeeded in killing many terrorists, because they deserted the camp immediately after hearing the first shot.

Another type of attack—the deliberate attack—was mounted when the terrorist camp was discovered while the presence of the British unit was still concealed. The patrol element that discovered the CTs kept the camp under surveillance and sent off a runner to inform the platoon leader or company commander, who quickly reached a decision regarding the time and form of action. If time (and skill) permitted it, the attack leader conducted his own reconnaissance of the site, being careful not to alert the enemy. By virtue of previous training and rehearsals in garrison, the attack leader was able to limit his attack orders to a few fundamental points, the others being covered by SOPs.

The attack force comprised two elements—an assault party and a cutoff party. Both elements secretly approached the camp, crawling the last 100 meters or so to their final positions. Troops often were able to crawl in this way to within five to twenty meters of the enemy perimeter. The crucial maneuver in the attack was the encircling of the CT camp. It had to be accomplished with great patience and stealth. Unless the camp was completely surrounded, the majority of terrorists usually escaped.

The assault began after sufficient time had passed to permit all elements to reach their positions. As soon as the assault party attacked, sometimes from two directions, the men in the cutoff party assumed the best possible firing positions and waited for targets to appear. SOPs demanded no indiscriminate firing and no movement out of position. Usually, there was a signal of some sort for a cease-fire. If any of the terrorists escaped, the patrol followed up on their trail as soon as possible after reporting the results of the raid, collecting material with intelligence value, and treating the wounded.

Speed was crucial in these operations. Jungle camps discovered in the evening might be deserted by daybreak. The guerrillas were adept at collecting their weapons and gear and disappearing in seconds. Frequently, only a few hours passed between discovery of a camp and the execution of an attack. Early morning attacks seemed to be favored in order to cover the approach of the attacking force, to catch the enemy while he was rising, and to leave as many hours of daylight as possible for pursuit, if required.

Combat Support

For combat support, the British Army in Malaya employed light armor, artillery, helicopters, and air support. No engineers were used, although one participant in the Emergency, Brigadier M. C. A. Henniker, believed that they could have been put to good use in improving and constructing roads, trails,

and jungle bases and in building bridges over streams.[36] Light-armored cars were used to escort motorized convoys and to patrol routes capable of being interdicted by the guerrillas.

Infantry commanders used artillery bombardments to harass the guerrillas and to keep them on the move. Artillery units might, for example, fire on suspected enemy camps or previously abandoned camps to discourage their reuse and to force the terrorists to leave them if they were occupied. Patrols then tried to pick up enemy tracks or listen at selected points for enemy movement. Field artillery was also used to soften up the enemy preparatory to a psychological operations campaign to induce surrenders.[37] To a great degree, however, artillery fires proved to be quite unproductive. Although the British fired thousands of shells into the jungle, they rarely obtained hits or kills as a result. Moreover, there was also the danger in the deep jungle that innocent aboriginal tribesmen might be hurt.

The limited capabilities of the early models of helicopters and the absence of experience in their use prevented comprehensive employment of helicopters in support of the infantry. Helicopters, however, were used for casualty evacuation (as were light aircraft), tactical deployment of small units, exchange of police garrisons in remote locations, transport of unit commanders from place to place, aerial spraying of the guerrillas' jungle crops, and limited air resupply. But helicopters had no direct offensive role in Malaya.

Fixed-wing aircraft, in contrast, performed a variety of offensive and support tasks. Offensively, fighters and bombers conducted occasional air strikes against enemy camps. However, experience showed that these camps were hard to hit because they were rarely visible from the air. The British used bombers, nonetheless, to harass the guerrillas, to maintain pressure on them, to force them to move, to lower their morale, and to deny certain areas for their use or passage. In large, brigade-size "blitz" operations, like Operation Termite in 1954, bombers were used to seal off areas not covered by patrols.[38] However, the bombers had many drawbacks. They often missed, and they could hit one's own troops or the aborigines.[39] The infantry rarely, if ever, used aircraft for close-air support.

Another valuable service provided by aircraft was photo reconnaissance. Many a jungle crop discovered by air reconnaissance was later destroyed by aerial spraying or bombing. In addition, the air forces provided communications flights to provide relays and to determine and report patrol locations with their navigational aids. Furthermore, cargo aircraft delivered supplies by parachute to remote outposts and long-range patrols. Occasionally, they delivered to jungle airstrips. The British also conducted a few parachute operations for jungle rescue and to deliver Special Air Service (SAS) teams into the deep jungle for extended reconnaissance.

Finally, "voice" aircraft and leaflet drops embodied the two major techniques of psychological operations against the terrorists. Using tapes made by surrendered enemy personnel or other Chinese speakers with insight into terrorist psychology, these voice aircraft broadcast generous terms for surrender and advised the terrorists on surrender procedures. Truck-mounted loud speakers were used in the same fashion along the jungle fringe. Combined with stringent food denial and relentless military pressure, these operations frequently bore fruit.

Individual Skills

The quality of British and Gurkha light infantrymen was an essential ingredient in the defeat of the Chinese insurgents in Malaya. The British recognized that their troops had to be able to meet the terrorists man to man in the jungle and beat them. To accomplish this task, the army developed soldiers with highly refined light infantry skills.

Roping down from a helicopter—a rehearsal

The qualities required by light infantrymen included noiseless movement, powers of observation, intense concentration, rapid and accurate fire, fire discipline, land navigation, knowledge of the jungle, patience, fitness, ability to camouflage, and promptness in taking immediate action in accordance with SOPs. Perhaps the most important quality of these soldiers, however, was their mental attitude of self-discipline. The nature of the war in the jungle demanded that the British and Gurkha soldiers be ever watchful. Because one mistake might send the quarry vanishing into the jungle or expose the patrol to fire, soldiers had to be constantly alert and tuned in to the situation. Furthermore, they had to deny themselves many basic amenities enjoyed by regular infantry in conventional warfare: cigarettes, baths, shaves, hot meals, and conversations at a normal level of speech. In some cases, ambush patrols had to relieve themselves in place for days and go without food.[40] The mental attitude obtained by soldiers helped them to endure the nervous strain of operations. The mental stress on men during patrols often exceeded the physical strain.

Another light infantry skill that the British placed great value on was marksmanship. To develop this skill, company- and battalion-size garrisons frequently established their own ranges. There, soldiers trained on all the weapons assigned to the unit in addition to their personal weapons. Special attention was given to quick fire, during which soldiers stalked each other carrying air guns and wearing face masks in a controlled jungle terrain. Units tasked to mount night ambushes or night patrols usually first practiced on the ranges at night, since experience had shown that soldiers typically fired high at night. The high value the British placed on marksmanship is evident in all editions of the ATOM manual. All high commissioners-directors of operations in their short forewords emphasized the vital importance of quick, accurate shooting under all conditions.

When not operating in the jungle, infantry units often exercised police skills, assisting the local police in their duties, especially during major efforts of food denial or route control. Troops on this kind of duty functioned under police supervision, but in accordance with their own chains of command. Their duties included searching vehicles and individuals, checking identity cards, guarding detainees, manning road blocks and village exits, and maintaining order. Tedious and wearing, these duties required a different kind of patience and alertness. Unused to such close contact with the civilian population, the infantry had to practice a restraint that contrasted markedly with their jungle combat roles.

Leadership

The highest quality of leadership was necessary in Malaya if the light infantry operations there were to be successful. Providing this leadership were Briggs, Templer, and their successors, who, while providing strategic direction, established and maintained the framework for effective tactical operations at company level and below. The army's senior tactical leaders also exercised outstanding judgment by allowing the noncommissioned officers (NCOs), platoon leaders, and company commanders to conduct their activities without interference. Characteristically, the senior leaders remained willing to listen

to the men on the ground. Thus, rather than impose their own ideas on the tactical units, they identified the best ideas in the field and distributed them throughout the army.

Just as the nature of the war brought out the best in soldiers, so it enhanced the performance of the leadership. Indeed, leaders provided such good examples in their positive guidance that it was reflected in the performance of their men. In addition, the leadership exhibited confidence, self-reliance, and the same high level of field craft as their men. Although decentralization in operations placed a heavier burden on leaders and increased their responsibilities, they rose to the challenge and displayed the necessary ability, imagination, and flexibility to react to unforeseen situations. This was important because a single decision by a patrol leader might send a squad on a three-day, forty-mile pursuit after fleeing guerrillas. The need to respond quickly and decisively was crucial to the effective conclusion of operations. Leaders had to possess a singleness of purpose and a relentless cast of mind to maintain the tactical efficiency and discipline of their men over the extended duration of each patrol and the campaign as a whole. When an opportunity to attack the guerrillas appeared, these NCOs and junior officers had to be ready to lead their men in violent, rapid action, often under very uncertain conditions. Decisiveness and an offensive spirit had no substitutes.

These traits were nurtured and developed both at the Jungle Warfare School and in actual operations, with the crucible of the field proving to be the best trainer, since success or failure usually depended on unit leadership. Decisiveness and the offensive spirit also grew in strength due to the decision by the higher leadership to place their trust, through decentralization, in their junior subordinates. Free of inhibiting higher interference, leaders were able to act aggressively.

Infantrymen smeared with black grease paint

Logistics

Most logistical functions in Malaya were performed and based in the various garrisons. Lines of communication occasionally were interdicted by the terrorists, but they could be resecured relatively easily.

In the early days of the war, air resupply of active operations was rare. Patrols carried the rations, spares, and ammunition that they needed on their backs. Because the patrols generally remained reasonably close to their garrisons, pack animals lacked usefulness and could be troublesome drawbacks, so they were not used. Later, as patrols stayed out longer and moved deeper into the jungle, air resupply by airdrop or airlanding at a jungle airstrip or landing zone became more prevalent. Care had to be taken in these activities that the CTs were not alerted by the presence of hovering helicopters or parachutes stuck in trees. Aircraft also transported some patrols to start positions, reducing the time and effort needed to reach the target area. Aircraft support was relied on more exclusively by deep Special Air Service patrols than by light infantry.

The British also devoted some attention to lightening soldiers' loads while on patrol. To further this end, light but appetizing rations were chosen. Because the soldiers looked forward to breakfast and supper on patrol, the command provided palatable food for these meals.

Other Important Practices

Military operations during the Emergency were also influenced by food control, deception, and route security. Food control was one of the pillars of the Briggs Plan and was vital to the overall counterinsurgent strategy. The aim of this policy was to isolate the guerrillas from their civilian supply sources, forcing them to rely on their own stocks or to move to another area and establish new sources of supply. Once the guerrillas' own stocks ran out (if they did not move), they began to starve and became vulnerable to the "voice" aircraft tempting them to surrender. If they chose to grow their own food in jungle clearings, it made them more visible and less mobile. Once spotted, their jungle crops became targets for aerial spraying, bombing, or investigation by foot patrols. Ultimately, successful food control could starve the guerrillas, who would lack the stamina and the will to stay on the run from healthy, active British patrols.

The British routinely practiced basic food control measures such as licensing sellers and restaurateurs, restricting personal food stocks, and requiring buyers to show ration cards. However, when the decision was taken to mount a major antiguerrilla operation, the British mounted a much more comprehensive food denial program. Food denial took many forms, but its aim was always to squeeze completely dry the daily trickle of supplies to the Communist terrorists in a particular area.

Usually, the British initiated food denial operations by surprise. Thus, when the civilians in an affected district awoke in the morning, they found every gate in the village fence guarded by police and soldiers. In addition, road blocks were emplaced at key points on all roads and vehicular trails. Every person or vehicle (including bicycles and carts) moving through these

gates and blocks was searched. "Continual patrolling of the wire fences, day and night . . . and a dozen other possible methods of smuggling had to be investigated and stopped."[41] Police also arrested all known food suppliers. Meanwhile, emergency restrictions on the cooking of food or on its sale were instituted. For example, every can of food sold during food denial had to be punctured upon sale to ensure its immediate use.

Tedious, unpopular, and wearing, these measures were manpower intensive. In fact, it frequently seemed as if there were not enough men to carry out the tasks. Infantry soldiers, clerks, cooks, and even officers and civilian dignitaries took their turns on the search lines. To facilitate matters, every soldier

Caught red-handed with rice in his bicycle pump

was trained in proper search procedures and in the recognition of contraband. These measures were carried out sometimes for weeks and months because it usually took that long for the guerrillas to feel the pinch. During this period, infantry patrols constantly watched the jungle fringe for contacts between civilians and CTs; they also saturated the jungle itself with harassing patrols.

These measures of food denial worked as long as the police and the army applied them rigorously. Eventually, the terrorists either had to leave the area, abandoning the organization it had taken them months and years to build, or, if they stayed, which was more normal, they were forced into dangerous (for them) acts of retaliation or response, such as ambushing food-supply truck columns. But once they emerged from their hideouts for such actions, the British hunted them down remorselessly.

Deception

The terrorists had many sympathizers and supporters in the civilian population, some in places (the Home Guard, telephone service, or the police force) where they could provide valuable information on upcoming British operations. As a result, if information was not guarded carefully, operations often failed. In addition to applying strict rules in regard to operations security, the British also learned to conduct deception to mask coming operations. Often, a great deal of imagination went into these deception activities.

For example, in 1954, the 63d Gurkha Infantry Brigade planned a big operation in the area of Seremban. To disguise it, the brigade contrived a deception plan that they called Operation Whipcord. Whipcord concerned a mythical future operation in a neighboring area, Bahau. To make the plan believable, the brigade ordered maps of the Bahau area and distributed them to units, requested a special rail-loading ramp be built at the Bahau railway station, circulated notices of forthcoming food checks and new regulations regarding food supply, and let slip other related information about the operation. In this way, the Communist terrorists in the real target area were led to relax their guards.[42]

Route Security

For many years, the terrorists were able to interdict the country's road network. In response, the British developed tactical SOPs for route security. Roads were coded according to the threat. "Unrestricted" routes, for example, required no escorts at all; they were considered to be safe. "Black" routes, on the other hand, required an armored-car escort. The SOPs prescribed other detailed procedures in regard to convoy organization, signals, briefings, lookouts, and immediate actions.[43] Violations of the SOPs led to tragedy sometimes as some foolhardy soldier risked the gauntlet.[44] According to Brigadier Henniker, the golden rule for travel was to "demonstrate to any would-be attackers that you would welcome an ambush so as to kill *them*."[45] One conveyed this message by ensuring that every convoy was properly armed, organized, alert, ready, and eager for a fight.